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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: PAPADOPOULOS CONFIDENT ON RE-ELECTION PROSPECTS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, Reason 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) During the course of a visit to Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos and his family at their beach house in Protoras, Ambassador asked Papadopoulos for his thoughts on the looming campaign. Papadopoulos's first reply was that "of the three of us, I think that my chances are best, because the other two have already reached their maximum in their ability to appeal to voters outside their party bases."

Papadopoulos added that AKEL's Christofias and DISY's Kasoulides were doing relatively well in energizing their respective party bases and creating "syspirosi8 (i.e., organizational elan and enthusiasm), but that a high degree of "syspirosi" within these large parties actually hindered their ability to attract votes outside these "clubs".

¶2. (C) Papadopoulos then commented that he thought he would be able to hive off a significant percentage of AKEL voters, though he acknowledged that the current polling did not augur well in this respect; AKEL has a vocal "so-called peace camp", said Papadopoulos, but this camp is much smaller than the large segments of the rank-and-file who actually support Papadopoulos's Cyprus policy. He predicted that, in the coming months, we would see significant AKEL defections toward his candidacy; while some such defections may be high-profile, there would be many more in the privacy of the voting booth in February. Papadopoulos also predicted that he would pick up some DISY votes as well, not so much because these voters liked him or his policy, but rather due to internal jostlings inside DISY: "Just imagine", said Papadopoulos, "Kasoulides, s campaign manager (DISY deputy chair Averof Neophytou) is well-known as the person who tried hardest to make sure that Kasoulides was not the party's candidate." At the same time, continued Papadopoulos, his own DIKO party would be strongly united, and defections within his electoral ally EDEK would be minimal.

¶3. (C) Papadopoulos did not explicitly put the UN-led July 8 process in the context of the presidential campaign, but did say that Turkish and Turkish Cypriot stalling on Cyprob diplomacy worked to his political benefit. "When they send the impression that somebody else would give them a better deal, what message does this give the Greeks (note: by which he means Greek Cypriots)? And when they talk endlessly of the Annan Plan, they remind the Greeks of the many fundamental things that the Greeks hated about the Plan."

¶4. (C) Ambassador noted to Papadopoulos that we are trying to make sure that the U.S. is not the focus of the presidential campaign; in particular, we want to avoid encouraging or being dragged into the debate. We would look strongly negatively on any candidate who seeks to campaign

against us, though we will try not to rise to the bait that might be dangled in the next six months. Such campaigning, continued the Ambassador, would be a clear substitute for a debate on political ideas actually aimed at facilitating reunification of the island. Ambassador, noting that he was making the same points to all electoral camps, strongly hoped for a campaign in which the three candidates sought to discuss their ideas of where to go in and after 2008, not who voted "yes" and who voted "no" in 2004, or who did what to whom in 1974 or 1963. Papadopoulos in reply addressed one of the Ambassador's points by declaring that he had no intention of running against Washington; on the contrary, he was often attacked by the opposition for being too close to the Americans via his support for the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), counter-terrorism cooperation, etc.

15. (C) Comment: Papadopoulos is tanned, rested, and ready for the campaign. Despite several reports that suggest that his in-house polling shows that he will have significant trouble hiving off enough voters from the largest parties to make it into the second round, Papadopoulos's confidence did not seem feigned. Our guess is that Papadopoulos is still betting that he is more clever and adept than his opponents, and, more fundamentally, that he will somehow be able to "nationalize" the campaign in a manner that turns what should be a debate about the future course of the Cyprus problem into a re-hash of the "yes" and "no" of the 2004 referendum.

End comment.

SCHLICHER